UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO
3 1822 00029 4728
CUL Annex
HD
6061
.S62
1892
AA 000 005 881 8
UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
California
Regional
Facility

Women's Wages

BY

WILLIAM SMART, M.A.

LECTURER ON POLITICAL ECONOMY IN QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE
AND IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

GLASGOW

JAMES MACLEHOSE, St. Vincent Street
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

1892

Annex
HD
6061
S62
1892

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

Women's Wages

498668

"Give her the wages of going on, and not to die."

Women's Wages

BY

WILLIAM SMART, M.A.

LECTURER ON POLITICAL ECONOMY IN QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE
AND IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

GLASGOW

JAMES MACLEHOSE, St. Vincent Street
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

1892

A paper read before the Philosophical Society of Glasgow,
9th Dec., 1891.

WOMEN'S WAGES.

It is not necessary to prove that women's wages are, as a rule, much under those of men. In the textile trades of Great Britain, which constitute the largest department of women's work, the average of women's wages is probably—in Scotland it is certainly—about ten shillings per week. This labour is not by any means unskilled, as anyone who has ever seen a spinning or weaving factory knows. Twenty shillings per week, however, is a low average for a man possessing any degree of skill whatever.

In a paper read before the British Association at Cardiff, Mr. Sidney Webb gave some valuable statistics on the subject. Women workers he divides into four classes—manual labourers, routine mental workers, artistic workers, and intellectual workers. The two latter classes may be dismissed in a word. Sex has little to do in determining the wages of their work. A novelist, a poet, a writer of any sort, is under no disadvantage that she is a woman, while in many departments of artistic work women have an obvious advantage. But in the third class, that of routine mental workers, Mr. Webb finds that women's earnings are invariably less than men's. In the Post Office and Telegraph

Departments, in the Savings Banks, and in the Government offices generally, where women do precisely similar work with men, and are sometimes, as in ledger work, acknowledged to do it better, they invariably earn much less. The largest experiment yet made in this direction is that of the Prudential Life Assurance Office, which began in 1872 to substitute women clerks for the lower grades of men clerks. There are now 243 ladies employed in routine clerical work, which they are said to do more efficiently than men. The salaries run thus:—£32 for the first year, £42 for the second, £52 for the third, and £60 on promotion—probably half of what men might be expected to accept. In Glasgow lady typists and shorthand writers are offering their services from 9.30 till 5, with one hour for dinner, for £25. In the teaching profession women almost invariably receive lower remuneration than men. The Education Department Report of 1888-90 gives the average wage of teachers throughout England and Wales as £119 for men and £75 for women. Similarly low salaries are found under the London School Board, in the Secondary Schools, and in girls' schools generally as compared with boys' schools.

The exception noted by Mr. Webb is interesting and, I think, suggestive. In the United States, where women teachers often alternate with men in the same school, the salaries of women are habitually lower. But in the State of Wyoming, where women have a vote, the salaries are equal.

Coming now to the manual workers, Mr. Webb takes the statistics furnished by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of

Labour in 1884. These give the average of 17,430 employés in 110 establishments in Great Britain, and 35,902 employés in 210 establishments in Massachusetts, representing in both cases 24 different manufacturing industries. The women's wages show a proportion of one-third to two-thirds the amount earned by men, the nearest approach to equality being in textiles—cotton goods, hosiery, and carpetings in Great Britain, woollen and worsted goods in Massachusetts. Without going further into statistics, I think we may assume the fact of a great disparity between men's and women's wages, and go on to ask the reason of it.

If we put the question in general terms, Why is a woman's wage less than that of a man? there are some answers that spring to the lips of everyone. First, it is said that it is a mere question of supply and demand. Second, that women are not usually the sole bread-winners in the family to which they belong. Third, that their standard of living is lower than that of men. Fourth, that their work is not so good as that of men. Fifth, that the commodities made by women have, generally, a less value in the market. There is truth in all these answers, but I propose to show that each of them is at best a half truth, raising as many questions as it settles.

The first answer given is that women's wages are low because of the equation of supply and demand. Only certain branches of industry are open to women. In these there is a great number of women competing for employment. They are free to take work or refuse it. But over the industrial community there are found enough women willing to take the low wage which

employers find they can offer, and free competition determines the level. If two women run after one employer, wages will fall; if two employers run after one woman, wages will rise.

Those who think this answer an easy and satisfactory one must be unaware of the unsettling of many problems since Mill's day. Mill had no less than three laws of value—that of the Equation of Supply and Demand, that of Cost of Production, and that of Differential Cost of Production. The former law, he said, applied to goods of which the quantity was naturally, or artificially, or temporarily, limited, and it was, besides, the sole determinant of the value of labour. But then Mill was assuming a definite Wage Fund—a fixed portion of the circulating capital of the country predestined for the payment of wages. This definite sum, and no more, was to employ all the workers, however many they might be. If, then, wages fell, the reason was obvious—there were too many workers. Wherever Mill touches on low wages we have a sermon on the evils of over-population, and his favourite explanation did not fail him here. "Where employers take full advantage of competition, the low wages of women are a proof that the employments are overstocked." But this is logical only if "overstocking" is the sole possible cause of low wages—which might be doubted even under a Wage Fund theory. But the Wage Fund is now one of the antiquities of political economy. Since Jevons we have looked for the measure of value in marginal utility; for the value of productive goods in their marginal utility as instruments of production; and for the value of labour in the value of its products, and not in any pre-

determined fund divided out among a variable number of workers by the action of supply and demand. And where invention is constantly widening and strengthening our power over natural resources and increasing the productiveness of labour, the presumption is against the idea that over-population is even a strong factor in modern wages.

There is, indeed, no formula in political economy on which the modern economist looks with more suspicion than that of Supply and Demand. The operation of supply and demand as determining market price is, of course, perfectly definite; but to say that any concrete price is fixed by the equation of supply and demand is a mere statement of an observed fact which says little, unless one knows and defines accurately what is involved in the "supply," what is involved in the "demand," and how those two factors stand related to each other. The price of railway stock to-day is determined by supply and demand; the price of a man's labour, whether unattached or working under restriction of the Trade Union, is determined by supply and demand; the earnings of the poor soul who sells her body on the streets are determined by supply and demand. What does this formula tell us unless we know the complex phenomena which determine the supply of railways and the demand for transit, the supply of labourers and the demand for work, the supply of hapless women and the demand for human souls? To say, then, that women's wages are low because there are enough women who take the low wage, is little more than to say that wages are low because people are paid low wages. We have still to ask: What are the factors, or

influences, or motives, that make women take a wage below that of men, and what are the factors that make employers offer the low wage?

Apart from the general insufficiency of this first answer, it is enough to remember that the determination of wage by this mechanical equation of supply and demand could be tolerable only under absolutely free competition, which would involve perfect mobility of labour. But labour has this unique characteristic among all commodities that, physically, it is not mobile; historically, it has never been mobile; and ethically, it should not be mobile. A man's labour is—and should be—his life, not the mere instrument of providing a living; and, therefore, in the question of wages it is impossible to ignore the ethical consideration. Civilised society could not hold together if the workman and workwoman could only get their fair share of the world's boundless wealth by changing their trade, their residence, or their country, as a higher wage offered itself.

The second reason given is that, women not being as a rule the sole bread-winners of the family, their wage is auxiliary to that of its head; the woman's wage is, as it were, "found" money in the household purse. Underlying this statement is an assumption which is at least questionable. It is that the economic or wage-earning unit is the *family*. This is an old-time idea which, however beautiful and desirable, is a little out of place in the conditions to which the factory system has brought us. Once-a-day it was recognised that children had a far greater claim on the persons who brought them into the world than we now allow. It

was thought that the one wage should be earned by the head of the house, and should be large enough to maintain the wife and daughters without outside work, and to educate and apprentice the sons till they were able to hive off for themselves. Any money earned by the junior members of the family was, in this case, supplementary, and determined by a different law. Perhaps in time we may come back to this view. Mr. Frederic Harrison is sanguine that we shall. But meantime the factory system has changed all that, and it is scarcely worth while looking for laws of wage in a condition of family life which does not now obtain. Putting aside the objections that many married women are not members of a family, and that many married women and widows are the sole bread-winners of the family, it is perhaps sufficient to point out that this answer would not be taken as explaining or justifying a low wage among what we call the "better classes." It would not be counted an excuse or reason for a publisher asking a lady novelist to accept a lower price for her books, or for a patient offering a lower fee to a lady doctor. If the sex of the author, artist, musician, doctor, intellectual or artistic worker generally, has nothing to do with her remuneration, why should sex determine the wage of the factory girl?

More clearly does this objection emerge when we consider the third answer. It is said that the inferiority of women's wage is owing to their standard of living being less than that of men. It is true that a woman, as a rule, eats less, drinks less, and smokes less. Tea to her is, unfortunately, both meat and drink, and it would be counted extravagance in a working woman if she took

to eating twopence worth of sweets a day as balancing the man's half ounce of tobacco. But I am afraid a woman's standard of life differs from a man's rather in its items than in its cost. I have yet to learn that her standard of dress is less than ours, and I am quite sure she takes more medicines, and spends more on doctors' bills. As in the former case, we change our view according as we look at different classes. Among the "upper" classes, as we call them, the woman's standard of life is very much higher than that of the man. It is only because the poor seamstress, when put to it, will live on a shilling a-day, while a man will become a tramp or go to the workhouse first, that we say the woman requires less.

In a word, it is not that the physical and mental needs of woman are less than the physical and mental needs of man, but that many women, for some reason or other, can be got to accept a wage that will only keep them alive. If so, the answer, translated, simply runs: women's wages are less than men's because, for some reason, women accept less.

It is to be noted, however, as very significant of the popular ideas about wage, that the second and third answers just given account for the standard of women's wages by the *wants* of the worker. A woman's wage is low because she does not *require* a high wage, whether it be because her father partly supports her, or because her maintenance does not require so much. Now it may be said in passing that it is quite against our modern ideas to represent wage as regulated by wants. Under a socialistic régime, indeed, the wages of all might be thrown into a common

purse, and divided out according to the wants and necessities of each; but under an individualist régime, like the present, what the worker *is* is nothing, what the worker *does* is everything. To assess the value of goods by the cost to the human life which makes them is to take ground on which the world is not prepared to follow the economist whatever it may say to the moralist. It is not the cost in killed and wounded that decides the battle. To the purchaser it is indifferent whether the cloth he buys wore out the fingers and heart of a woman, or only took a little tear and wear out of a machine. The one question he asks is: How will the cloth wear? *Caveat venditor.* If a man-worker, then, is supposed to get a high wage when he produces much, a low wage when he produces little, why should a woman's wage be determined by another principle? We cannot hunt with the individualist hounds and run with the socialist hare.

The next two reasons, accordingly, put the low wages of women on quite different and more scientific ground, namely, that of the work they produce. Of these the fourth says that women's work is not so good as men's. As a statement of fact this is probably true. It is no disparagement to the sex to acknowledge that, if women are necessarily off work several days in the year because of little ailments common to them, if they are insufficiently nourished relatively to their needs, or are naturally more delicate than men, their wage at the week's end will be less than that paid to the average man who scarcely knows what a headache means. Or, if the woman is compelled by law to leave the factory at six, while the man can stay and work overtime; or, if she is

driven to the street for an hour at meal-time, while the man can gulp his tea within the walls and get back to his work half-an-hour earlier; we can see that the wage of the man will be higher by the time and the overtime he works. Similarly, if it requires not only skill but strength to work a heavy loom; or, if a man can do two jobs, the one alternative to the other; or, if he can "set" and "point" his tools as well as work his machine, while a woman has to go to the mechanic's shop for these things; in cases like these—and they are, of course, very many—we require no answer to our question. It is simply a case of better wages for better work—better in quantity, or in quality, or, at least, in advantage to the employer. That is to say, if men and women are working side by side at the same trades, and under similar conditions, it requires little explanation to say why the wages of men should be 20s. and the wages of women, say, 15s.

If this were all, the inferiority of women's wage would not be primarily a question of sex at all; it would be very much a question of unskilled labour as compared with skilled labour. Women would get lower wages than men for the same reason as the dock labourer gets lower wages than the artisan, and the artisan than the physician. The world might suffer nothing in pocket by adopting the principle—which, however, I am afraid is yet far from general acceptance—of Equal Wages for Equal Work, whatever the sex of the worker. And here it is that Mr. Sydney Webb deserves thanks for having accented a fact which we all indeed knew, but of which few of us saw the bearing. It is that men and women do not, as a rule, produce similar work

alongside of each other, and that any argument which compares the wages of both sexes, without taking account of this fact, quite misses the mark.

To recur to the facts adduced by Mr. Webb : it seems to be impossible, he says, to discover any but a few instances in which men and women do precisely similar work in the same place and at the same epoch. In the tailoring trade, for instance, men do one class of garment, women another. In the cigar trade women make the lower-priced goods. So in all the Birmingham trades. In paper mills men do the heavier, women the lighter work. In cotton spinning, the mule tenders, called, *par excellence*, "spinners," are men, while women take all the preparatory processes. But there is one exceptional trade where this does not hold. "Weaving," says Mr. Webb, "appears to be nearly always paid at equal rates to men and women, whatever the material or locality." This seems to hold as regards the weaving industry generally, from the hand-loom weavers of Ireland to the carpet weavers of our own country ; and it extends also to other countries, as, for instance, to the cotton and silk weaving in France. That is to say, as I understand, that the piece-work rate is the same, although in special cases strength may give the man an advantage in handling heavy looms. But what is most remarkable is that, over the great weaving district of Lancashire, not only are the rates of piece-work the same, but men and women do exactly the same work side by side in the same sheds, practically under the same Factory Act restrictions, and earn equal wages, namely, an average from 17s. 11d. in Carlisle to 21s. 4d.

in Burnley. This, however, is distinctly and notably an exception. Women compositors, for instance, in London, receive uniformly lower piece-work rates for exactly similar work; for the same work the union man gets 8½d., the non-union man 7½d., and the woman only 5½d. As an exception, however, we shall have reason to recur to the Lancashire weavers later.

We thus come naturally to the fifth answer given to our question. It points to the fact that the kind of commodities made by women, or in women's trades, have, generally, a less value in the market—they are "cheap" goods. Even as a mere statement of fact this proposition is very loose. What are cheap goods? In the absence of any absolute standard of value, goods can be called cheap only as comparing present prices with prices of similar goods in the past, or in consideration of their cost of production as compared with other goods. If the former is meant, all modern manufactured goods are cheap, and this would not explain the lower wage of one sex. If the latter, it is prejudging the whole question. But to make this statement an explanation, and suggest that cheap prices are the cause of low wages, is surely to turn the causal connection the wrong way about; for the value of goods such as we are speaking of depends, according to the recognised theory, on cost of production, and of this cost of production wages is a large part. It is true that the connection between prices and wages is one on which economic science is somewhat slow to speak. We may not now be so confident as Mill was when he put the proposition "high prices make high wages" among common erroneous notions. And we may not be

prepared to say with him that the effect of prices on wages is only indirect, through increased profits adding to capital. But we are not prepared, I think, to go in face of all our old faith, and declare that the *prices* of goods determine their cost of production!

But as a fallacy is not usually put in a bald form, we must consider the concrete case in which it is assumed. Let us take an industry—say a branch of the textile trade—where labour constitutes a great part of the costs of production. Suppose that for many years low prices have ruled for the particular class of goods made. Any attempt to raise wages here meets with an obvious criticism. It seems most plausible to say: It is the wants of the people which have established this demand. The present price is all the consumers can or will pay, and the low wage is all that these prices can afford.

This is probably quite true. Once the prices are down, it is difficult to see how wages can be higher. But what brought down the prices? Is it ever the case that the world of consumers, practically, go to the workers and ask them to accept low wages on the ground that they can only afford low prices? Experience does not bear this out. So far as I know, the initiative of reducing prices, as a rule, comes from the producers, not from the public. The history of prices of most commodities of large use is something like this. They are at first dear, and only a small circle of consumers can afford them. As the production becomes organised, and capital brings more and more appliances to bear on the manufacture, the goods become

cheaper, and a wider circle of demand is found. But below each circle of actual demand there are endless and widening circles of potential demand ready to take any particular commodity if it can be had cheaper. Thus, as, up to a certain point, large production is cheap production, there is always an inducement to the manufacturer and merchant to produce more cheaply. If they can reduce prices, and get down to a lower circle of consumers, it is well known in practical experience that the increase of trade which follows is out of all proportion to the degree of the reduction of price. But when this movement has gone on for some time, and goods have become very cheap, the demand has a way of appearing imperative, especially if these goods have entered into the standard of comfort of great classes. The goods become "necessary;" the low prices meet a "natural" demand; and these prices are just enough to yield an average profit to the employer—for profit must have its average, or capital, as we are often warned, will fly the country.

This is all quite true. The fallacy emerges only when it is suggested that the low prices are the cause of low wages. Here there are two possibilities: (1) All the reduction of cost may have been effected by perfecting machinery, organising production, and bringing producer and consumer together—that is to say, all the cheapening may have come from the side of capital. In this case there is no room for laying low wages at the door of cheapened prices. Or (2) as wages constitute one of the chief costs in all production—in the United States, for instance, they make up on an average a quarter of the manufacturing cost—they may

have been reduced along with the capital expenses, and the low prices be partly due to these low wages.

What this does prove is, of course, that it was the reduction of wages, among other things, that made the reduction of prices possible. But what it was proposed to prove was the converse proposition, that the low prices made the low wages! To put it, then, in the plausible way, that the reduced prices "do not allow" of higher wages, is simply a very pretty specimen of the argument known to the vulgar as "putting the cart before the horse." What, however, we may very well learn from the wide acceptance of this view is that it is a very difficult thing to raise wages once they are down; and it may suggest that employers have some responsibility in reducing, and the public some responsibility in giving excuse for them being reduced.

Thus we seem to be still without an adequate answer to the question: Why is a woman's wage less than that of a man? But the last answer, unsatisfactory as it is in itself, seems to me to have a value in something further that it suggests. It seems to draw attention to a notable fact, and to point the way to a new formulation of the whole question. The fact is this, that women are in almost exclusive possession of certain branches of trade, and that, in these branches, the commodities made are recognised by public opinion as being "cheap." The observation of most of us must confirm Mr. Webb's conclusion, that there are certain trades where men do not compete with women; indeed, that there is a well marked relegation of women-workers towards certain ill-paid trades; while, at the same time, there is as well marked a move-

ment of men towards the better-paid trades. If this is so, the difference of wages between men and women takes a new and definite aspect. It is not a difference of wage between workers of various degrees of efficiency. It is very much a question of difference of wage between two non-competing groups, and of groups where the levels of wage are determined by a different law. The question is not: Why are men and women employed in equal work at unequal wages? but, Why are men and women employed in different groups of employment? and, comparing these two groups, Why is the wage level of skilled female labour lower even than that of unskilled male labour?

The reasons may be found in observing a course of events constantly under our eyes. There are always certain trades where women are still competing more or less directly with men. In these, women are under certain disabilities of sex which make their work less remunerative or less profitable to their employers. They are, as I said, physically weaker; subject to little ailments which make them less regular in attendance; more liable to distraction of purpose; perhaps worse educated; and, probably, more slipshod in their methods. They get less wages because, either in quantity or quality or both, their work is not so good. This competition of the women tends to drag down wages for both sexes, and, as a consequence, men hive off to trades where there is more opportunity, or retain certain better-paid branches within trades, and certain trades or branches of trades are left to women. Whenever this is the case the women lose the advantage of competing with workers who will not accept wages under a

certain level. Their disabilities, thus become cumulative, are taken advantage of by unthinking or unscrupulous employers, and all other employers are forced to follow.

If tailors and tailoresses are working side by side making coats and vests indifferently, it is not difficult to understand why the men may earn 20s. to the women's 15s. But if, in time, the men get all the coats, and the women all the vests, we have a good reason why the women's wage goes down to 10s., while the men's remains at 20s.

Or equally common is another course of events. A certain industry, we shall suppose, has been worked exclusively by men. By a "happy" invention machinery is introduced which can be tended perfectly well by women. For a little time the dead weight of custom will probably retain men to tend these machines, and the wage will certainly not fall below the average wage of men generally, which we shall, for simplicity's sake, put down at 20s. But, either gradually or as result perhaps of a dispute or strike on the part of the men, women are introduced to tend the machines. Does their pay bear any proportion to that of the men they replace? It is quite certain that the women's remuneration will not be determined by the 20s. wage which they displace, but will be fixed at something like 10s. If we ask why, the only answer given is that 10s. is the "customary wage" for women.

People who have no practical experience are apt to think that economists are theorising in speaking of "customary" wage. It will be said that the steady replacing of hand labour by

machinery, and of old machines by improved machines, breaks up the continuity of wages, and weakens the element of custom. A simple illustration from a trade I know very well will show how far this is true. In the cotton thread trade, spooling—that is, winding the thread on the small bobbin familiar to every work-basket—was for many years done by women sitting at single machines not unlike sewing machines, filling one spool at a time. The customary wage was sixpence per gross of 200-yard spools; a good worker could spool at least four gross per day, and make twelve shillings a week. As in all industries, machinery was gradually introduced by which cunning arrangements of mechanism did the greater part of the work; instead of turning out one spool at a time the girl now watched the machine turning out six, or nine, or twelve spools. When these machines were introduced, how were the wages determined? For a few weeks the girls were put on day wages, and when the machines were in good working order, and the average production per machine had been ascertained, the piece-work rate was fixed so as to allow of the girl making the same average wage as she did before. That is to say, if the new machine turned out in the same time six gross for every one gross turned out by the hand machine, the price of labour per gross was reduced from sixpence to one penny, and the wage continued at the customary level. So far as sacrifice or skill goes, there was no reason why the worker should get more, as, on the whole, it required less skill and attention to turn out the six gross than it did to turn out the one. Thus it is, I believe, over all the textile manufactures, with the exception, perhaps, of weaving.

The introduction of new processes displaces labour, but the labour left does not get higher wages.

This, then, is the first conclusion I would come to: that in more cases than we would believe the wage of women-workers is a "customary wage," fixed at a time when the world was poorer, and capital was more powerful.

This conclusion is, I think, strengthened by the case which, at first sight, would seem to refute it. The great outstanding exception to low wages in women's industries is, as before noted, in the Lancashire weaving.

There, not only are the rates of piece-work the same, but men and women do exactly the same work side by side, practically under the same Factory Act restrictions, and earn equal wages, namely, an average of from 17s. 1d. in Carlisle to 21s. 4d. in Burnley.

But there is an exceptional circumstance in their case. It is that the women are in the same strong Trade Union with the men, and under the same obligations to the Union, and that any attempt to reduce the wages of the one sex would be resisted with the whole strength of both. But what if this Union were to break down?

It is as certain as anything based on experience can be that in a few weeks, or even days, it would be possible for the employers to reduce the wages of the women-workers; that, rather than lose their work, women would consent to the reduction; that, as they accepted lower wages, men would drop off to other industries, and would cease to compete for the same work;

and that, in a comparatively short time, power-loom weaving would be left, like its sister cotton-spinning, to women-workers exclusively, and wages fall to the general level of women's wage. For what we are apt to forget is the constant inducement before the employer to reduce women's wages. There are two ways in which a manufacturer can add to his profits. One is by getting up his prices, the other by reducing his costs. In the present state of competition we know what the chance of getting up prices is, unless there is some element of monopoly in the case, and even then it generally requires a combination or syndicate of makers. But the employer is always looking out for ways of reducing cost. Theoretically, the most obvious way of all is by reducing wages. In men's trades, where reductions of wage are jealously watched, employers think twice, however, before they try that particular reduction of cost. In many factories, again, women's wages are purely customary, and employers would not think of touching them. But in the factories where wages are customary and almost fixed, the wages are also *low*. If the customary wages in cotton-spinning were 16s. a week instead of 10s., I venture to think that employers, in times of keen competition, would be inclined to try a reduction. I mean that, if the customary level of women's wages is 10s., the reason why it does not go lower is chiefly because it cannot.

And here, I think, we are at the root of the matter. In looking over the field of factory industries, in order to arrive at an average of women's wages, it has struck me that the variations from the average of 10s. a week are comparatively small. This is

not an average made up from widely different wage-bills, and from widely varying individual wages, but from pay sheets that show small amounts of variation on one side or other.

This definiteness of average wage seems to me most explicable on the supposition that women's wages are very near the only quite definite level that political economy has ever pointed out, the level of subsistence.

There are two ways, known to theory, of determining wage. In a progressive society, where wealth is rapidly increasing, the tendency will be towards payments by *results*, that is to say, by value of product. Product being in this case the result of the co-operation of land, labour, and capital, the problem is to find the share in that product which is economically due to labour—that is to say, the share "attributable" to the efficacy of labour. In a poor or backward society, again, where labour and capital are struggling with an unfriendly environment, and the return to industry is still uncertain, the risk and the chances of speculation in the return are left to the only class who can take risks, the capitalists.

England long ago passed from the latter to the former description of society, and of her increased wealth the men-workers have obtained, we may suppose, something like a share corresponding to the increased value of the joint product. But, owing to want of organisation of women-workers, it is yet possible to pay women by the other standard—namely, according to their *wants*—and to keep them at the same level of wage as they were content to take half-a-century ago.

It seems to me, in fact, that while men's wages, unless in the case of unskilled workers, are determined ultimately by the value of product which is economically "attributable" to their work, women's wages are determined by the older and harsher law. "The wages, at least of single women," said Mill, "must be equal to their support, but need not be more than equal to it; the minimum in their case is the pittance absolutely required for the sustenance of one human being. . . . The *ne plus ultra* of low wages, therefore (except during some transitory crisis, or in some decaying employment), can hardly occur in any occupation which the person employed has to live by, except the occupations of women."

But, indeed, it is a lower depth to which women's wages have fallen than the "sustenance of one human being." There may be persons that think 10s. a week is sufficient to keep a grown-up factory girl, living by herself, in healthy and decent life. It certainly is true that in many cases it has to serve till she accepts the release of marriage; but surely the marriage of the English girl, factory or otherwise, is a matter too serious to have the escape from a miserable wage added to its attractions. It is sufficiently obvious that this level of wage was never determined by sustenance, but by the competition of the "single woman" with married women and widows who will take any wage rather than see their children starve, with girls sent into the factory to add their few pence per week to the earnings of the head of the house, and with children.

If this is so, what are the remedies? They are, briefly, organisation and enlightenment of the public conscience.

First, organisation is necessary to protect women against employers and against themselves—the one no less than the other. The true enemies of the workers' organisations are, on the one hand, the grasping employer, and, on the other, the "blackleg" worker. By the grasping employer I mean the employer who really wishes to make a gain at the expense of the people whom he employs; it is easy to see why he dislikes the trade union. But the good employer—if he could only lift his horizon a little—would see that he requires the help of the trade union, inasmuch as he cannot keep up the wages if the workers do not assist him. The best, the most amiable and just manufacturer, must sell his goods at the same prices as his rivals. If these rivals, by securing low-priced labour, can reduce the prices of their goods, he is almost forced to reduce his wages. Consequently, if the trade unions could prevent low-priced labour being offered they would most materially assist the great majority of employers—for I am sanguine enough to believe that most employers are anxious to pay their workers as high a wage as they can. But the best employers are helpless to remedy the evils of a class of workers who are hopelessly at war among themselves, and ready to take each a lower wage than the other. Where a girl, coming out of a comfortable home, is willing to take ten shillings a week because to her it is "pocket money;" where the mother of five will take eight shillings because her husband is out of work and she is the sole bread-winner; where the mother of ten will accept six shillings because she has so many mouths to feed; where the girl just in her teens will take four shillings because

she is a little girl—where all these different women, with different motives, are competing against each other for equal work, there is no remedy but the severe one of *preventing* these poor souls from dragging down the wage of each other. If women are ever to get a fair day's wage on the ground of a fair day's *work*, as distinguished from the wage determined by a woman's necessity, it will only be by the old remedy of combination and the protection of the average working woman against the more helpless members of her own sex.

But, second, enlightenment of the public conscience must supplement organisation. It should not be difficult to convince educated people that women's work should be paid on the same principle as that of men—that is to say, according to their product, and not according to their wants; and to make them pay, or insist on the worker being paid, equal wages for equal work. But the point on which enlightenment does seem very much needed is that of the supposed necessity for low wages.

I do not know how there could be any such necessity unless it was the case that labour and capital, like land in some countries, had entered on the stage of decreasing returns, and had, moreover, gone so far on that down grade that the additional returns grew more slowly than population—and no one has even suggested such an idea. I have already tried to point out the fallacy that low prices explain low wages. It is, however, perhaps advisable to note that they do not even, to any great extent, condone, much less justify them.

Probably we are all familiar with an argument like this:

Consider, it is said, the great fact that calico is twopence a yard. Every woman in England may now be clad in cotton fabrics which, a century ago, were beyond the purchasing power of a queen. Beware how women are encouraged to ask and to stand for higher wages, or calico will again be put beyond the reach of any but queens. I confess I never heard this caution without remembering Carlyle's indignant reply:—"We cannot have prosperous cotton trades at the expense of keeping the Devil a partner in them." The weakness of it will become obvious if we carry the matter a little further and argue that if we can succeed in reducing women's wages still more, say, to 5s. per week, we shall have a considerable reduction in calico, and bring it within the reach of still poorer people.

It is Dickens, I think, who speaks of a horse that was fed on a system which would have reduced his cost of upkeep to a straw a day, and would, no doubt, have made him a very rampageous animal at that if, unfortunately, the horse had not died! The idea that cheapness of goods makes up for everything in the workers' circumstances is, perhaps, the most deplorable of current fallacies. It is no less than that of mistaking the whole end and aim of industry. The goal of economic effort is not accumulation of wealth, but the support of wealthy human beings—not "goods," as Aristotle told us long ago, but the "good life." True economical cheapening of production is cheapening of natural powers *outside* of man—not cheap labour, but cheap machinery, cheap organisation, cheap transit. This is a kind of cheapening of product which can go on indefinitely. From the dawn of civilisation man

has been turning a hostile or indifferent environment into a rich and friendly one. For ages, indeed, constant war hindered this conquest of nature. It is only in this century that comparative peace among nations has allowed the majority of men to give all their time and thought to the economical life, and even yet the locusts of standing armies eat up great part of our harvest field. But the changes which have been made on the earth, as we know it, the natural resources of matter and force now under our control, the complex and sensitive organisation which knits the world together, all point to possibilities of wealth beyond the wildest dreams of last century. There is some fatal leak in our industrial system if every child in Great Britain this year is not the heir of a richer heritage, at least of richer possibilities, than the child of last year. If our fathers a generation ago earned 20s. by day labouring, we should be earning 40s. by day labouring; or, if we are still earning only 20s., the 20s. now should buy what 40s. did then.

Now, as this suggests, there are two lines which the economical progress of the workers may take—that of advancing wages or that of cheapening products. Which of these is preferable? Without entering on any more discussion, two considerations may show that there is no comparison between the two, so far as the workers are concerned.

First, the ideal condition of average human life is a condition of well-paid wage earning; of steady assured labour, which does not strain or stress, and is crowned visibly by the fruit of its own exertion. There is nothing more depressing to the thoughtful

economist than the waste, positive and negative, which comes of disorganised labour; where the working man and his wage are the sport of speculation, and the period of high wages and overtime is succeeded by periods when the worker is thrown on the streets to learn the bad lesson of spare time without culture, and of leisure without rest. It is of small comfort to the working man that the manufacturer and merchant share the bad time with him, and that stocks are thrown on the market at "ruinous sacrifices." In vain is the cheap sale advertised in sight of the penniless buyer.

Second, while from one point of view it is all the same whether a worker's wage is raised from 20s. to 40s. a week, or whether everything he buys is reduced by 50 per cent., the balance of advantage is not so simple as this. If the wages are raised the worker alone gets the benefit. If commodities are reduced in price those who consume them—namely, the whole community—get the benefit. If, by reducing Tom's wages, you reduce the price of commodities which Tom, Dick, and Harry buy, Tom divides the economic advantage, such as it is, with Dick and Harry. Thus reduction of wages is never fully compensated by reduction of prices. The seigniorage of current commodities is borne, not by the community but by the workers.

Thus, I repeat that, while the fact that wider circles of population get the advantage of cheap goods is some mitigation of the evil, it is no justification of it. There is no reason why products should reach wider and wider circles, except that the cheap products are a gain to the wider circles. And if this gain tends

to be outweighed by the evils of reduced wages, calico at twopence a yard may be too cheap.

But if there is still some question whether, economically, it is justifiable and advisable to organise workers to ask higher wages, and to educate the public conscience to pay them, it may be settled, as regards women at least, by this simple consideration. Wealth in Great Britain, according to Mr. Giffen, increases annually by 3 per cent., while population increases by only 1·3 per cent. That is to say, wealth increases more than twice as fast as population. In the light of this statistic it *cannot* be economically necessary that women's remuneration for labour should remain at the subsistence level. If this was a fair wage fifty years ago, it cannot be so now.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 005 881 8

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388
Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

JAN 1[illegible] 2006

Univ
S